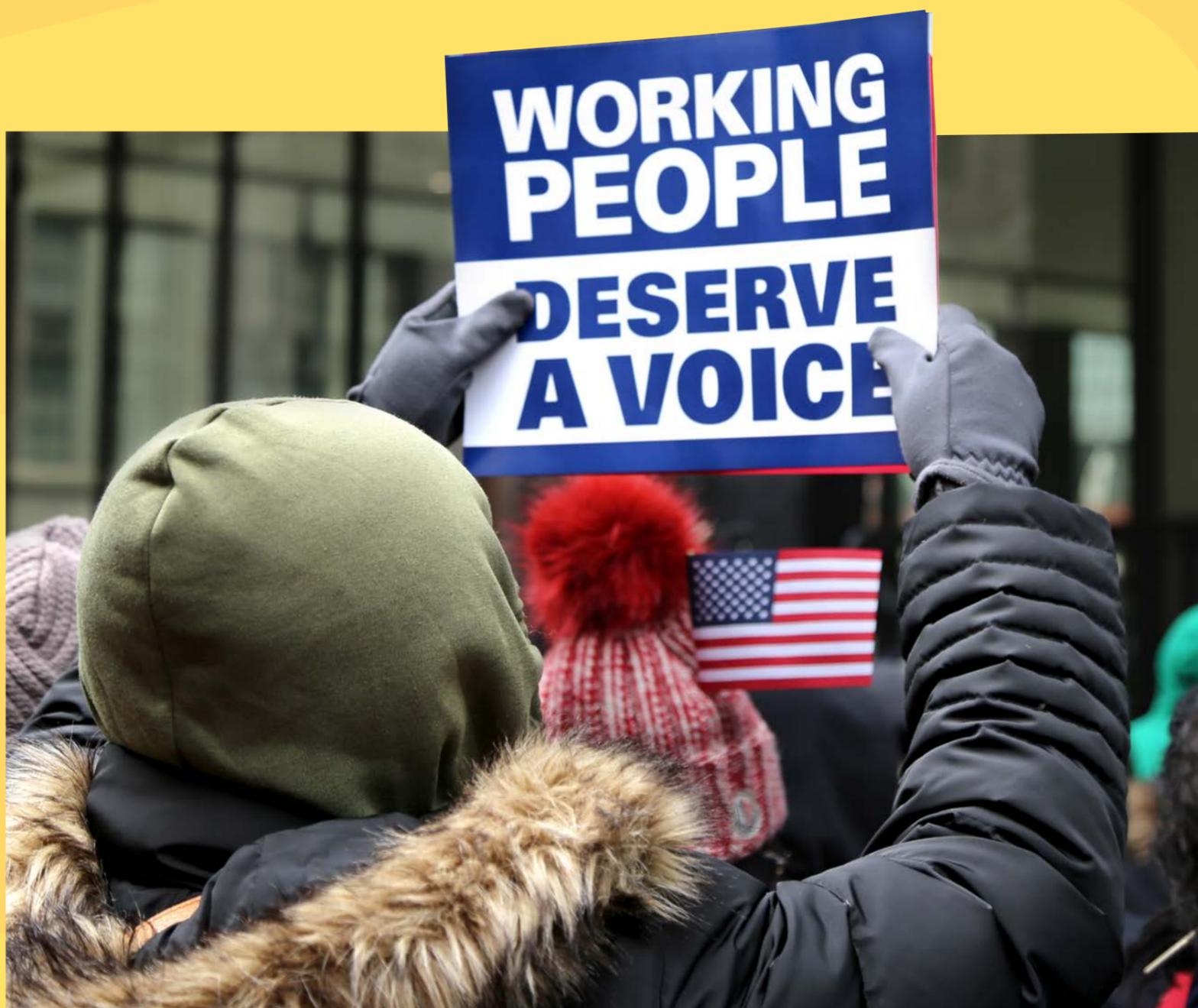




# MOVE

Illinois Council 31 - American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees - AFL-CIO



## *Our Freedoms Under Fire*

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**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

**What I learned at the dining room table**

*Unions help set the standards for education, skill levels, wages, working conditions and quality of life*



ROBERTA LYNCH

**SPEAK UP,  
BECAUSE IT  
IS THE RIGHT  
THING TO DO.**

**A**nthony Ruhlessin, the son of AFSCME Local 3477 member Jeannie Bellina, has been awarded a 2018 Family Scholarship by AFSCME International because of his excellent academic and extracurricular record at Guerin College Preparatory High School. I was so impressed with his grasp of the critical importance of unions—and the challenges we face—that I am ceding my column to his application essay. Well done, Anthony, and best of luck.—RL

“My mother, Jeannie Bellina, works as a Juvenile Probation Officer and is a proud member of AFSCME Local 3477, which is the local representing Juvenile Probation Officers employed by the Cook County Circuit Court.

“As the son of a union advocate I had the opportunity to participate in protests over fair contracts, violation of contract terms and threats of job losses. I remember sitting at the dining room table having conversations about the importance of unions and what they mean for working families like ours.

“Unions help set the standards for education, skill levels, wages, working conditions, and quality of life for workers. Being part of a union membership meant our family didn’t have to struggle to make ends meet with a low wage, no-benefit job. It meant a single mother could be confident that I would have more opportunities than she had.

“I remember when I was 14 years old; I had a big health scare. The doctors thought I developed heart problems because of an abnormal EKG. Thank God, after seeing many specialists I’m okay. One of the common themes my mother was grateful for was having a job with good health care. Because of my mom’s good union job, not only did my family have enough for the necessities such as affordable health insurance, we had enough for extras, too. We were able to take road trips to different parts of the country and visit our family in Puerto Rico. As a single mom she was able to provide me with a good quality of life, health insurance, paid bills, and contribute to her pension.

“I believe being part of a

union gives my mother a sense of peace. She knows that she is part of something that will fight against threats of layoffs or job eliminations and losing what most of us would think are basic life necessities—a home, food, transportation and the ability to support children.

“My mom has consistently reinforced the value of these experiences and the importance of being the voice for those who cannot speak for themselves. To ensure that the rights of all people are never devalued, the responsibility to serve and give back is as embedded in me as is my name. This is a blessing because union families like mine are becoming less common. The right to bargain collectively is under attack. As bargaining is weakened, working families like the one I’ve

**“The right to bargain collectively is under attack.”**

grown up in are losing their hold on the American Dream. Unions only work through solidarity; it gives them a powerful voice in America.

“My mother’s job as a probation officer is not promising her that she’ll be rich one day. She certainly does not mingle with CEOs and I don’t think she ever attended an elite black-tie affair. But every day she works to provide services to children on probation, and keep our community safe with her head held high. She helps some of the most vulnerable families get help with mental health, school, drug treat-



Anthony Ruhlessin

ment, and leading crime-free lifestyles. Throughout my life, I had the opportunity to hear her talk with her young clients. She made sure she greeted every client with a smile and with the kindness of her heart. She always took the time to understand them, so she could help them.

“My mom is proud of her job as much as she is her union. She knows how important her work is in a city that’s full of violence. Her union has helped her realize the impact that she makes on young lives. She also knows that because she has a union, she has a seat at the bargaining table with her employer. She felt safe doing her job because the union created good working conditions.

“Joining the union at my part-time job at Mariano’s has made my mother proud. The value of standing with your co-workers to demand respect and fair treatment is something I plan to pass on.

“Although I don’t know if I will end up in a unionized job, these experiences have taught me how to be a better person, to be compassionate, and fight for what I believe in.

“As my mother would say: Speak up, because it is the right thing to do.”

# AFSCME member Pamela Knight killed in the line of duty

*Union mourns Knight's death and honors her service with action*



**I**t was a Friday evening in late September when AFSCME Local 448 member Pamela Knight, a DCFS child protection specialist, was sent to take a two-year-old child into protective custody. As she got out of her car, Knight was attacked by the little boy's abusive father, Andrew Sucher, who'd previously been charged with assaulting a woman and aggravated battery of a six-year-old boy.

Brutally beaten, Knight suffered blunt force trauma to her head, she spent the next four months largely unresponsive as she underwent multiple surgeries and hospital transfers.

After 11 years on the job, 59-year-old Pamela Knight paid the ultimate price for protecting children from abuse and neglect. She died Feb. 8 as a result of her injuries.

Knight was a beloved wife, mother and grandmother. She had served the public at DCFS and Lutheran Social Services, as well as in law enforcement and as a foster mother.

"If you were Pam's friend and you needed something, she would go out of her way to help," her friend and co-worker Dawn Bliefnick said. "My son was taken to the ER one day and I couldn't get ahold of my husband. She left work and sat with me until he came. When my mother died, she came to the funeral. She was the kind of person who showed up for her friends."

Knight and Bliefnick began their training at DCFS at the same time and worked in the Sterling office together for more than a decade. Losing Knight has been very hard on everyone there.

"Our office is like a family," Bliefnick said. "It's special. This is so hard because it was trau-

matic and unexpected. It's like we lost a family member."

**"Our office is like a family. It's special. This is so hard because ... it's like we lost a family member."**

Sucher now faces up to life in prison for five counts of first-degree murder, aggravated battery causing great bodily harm, aggravated battery of a state employee and other charges. His trial is underway.

## Dangerous job

DCFS EMPLOYEES ARE THE front line of defense in protecting children in Illinois. In this important work, they often encounter families in crisis stemming from poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence and other challenges. Because they must insert themselves into stressful, sometimes dangerous situations

in order to keep kids safe, employees often face threats, harassment and violence on the job.

Workers feel the environment is becoming even more dangerous as rising income inequality and a lack of services exacerbate problems of untreated addiction and mental illness. Threats and violence are regular occurrences. One worker in Chicago was attacked at a school by a child's mother. In Southern Illinois, a supervisor was knifed by a mother with extreme mental health issues.

"We accept it as part of our job that people are upset and don't want to be involved with us, but it feels amped up in recent years," said Kathy Lane, a child welfare administration case reviewer and president of AFSCME Local 448. "People are simply unable to provide the parenting their children need because they have unresolved issues and no services to help them. Huge waiting lists don't work for people in crisis."

After Knight's murder, workers are more frightened and frustrated than ever.

"I get severe anxiety when I'm on call now," said Bliefnick. "I get chest pains. We go out with a pad of paper and that's the only defense we have. Sometimes, especially in small towns, there are no police officers on duty to help me."

## Taking action

AFSCME'S DCFS STANDING COMMITTEE, made up of 16 front-line employees from across the state, has been pushing agency management to institute policy changes to improve employee safety.

Some progress has been made, including a commitment to armed security guards in DCFS offices in the next fiscal year and new signage for field-staff vehicles which may allow them to park closer to their destination. But management has yet to take action on key union proposals for staff training on threat identification, de-escalation and self-defense; creating a culture of clinical supervision instead of supervising to the numbers; and improving the public perception of the importance of the work performed by dedicated staff.

AFSCME is also working to pass legislation to establish strong reporting requirements regarding safety and accountability in DCFS and to strengthen penalties for assault on a DCFS employee.

On Feb. 13, the General Assembly honored Pam Knight's passing with a moment of silence. Sen. Melinda Bush called on DCFS to take steps to ensure the safety of its employees by following the union's recommendations.

"Pam Knight died in the service of our state, her community and to protect a small child who could not protect himself," Bush said. "We have a responsibility to do everything we can to ensure that a tragedy like this will never happen again."

AFSCME members in DCFS will continue to honor Knight's memory with action, determination and unity.

"That's the biggest help," Bliefnick said. "Everybody being there for each other." 

# Union wins in primary election pave way for November

*Working families determined to secure a better future*

**M**ore than 75 percent of the candidates endorsed by AFSCME won the March primary. Now these candidates will carry forward the fight to defend workers' rights in the November general election.

Union members made a big difference in these critical races, knocking on doors, making phone calls and taking to the polls to make it happen.

"The outcome of the primary elections was a major

voters across the political spectrum," Cameron said. "More than 80 percent of voters casting a ballot in the gubernatorial race supported a candidate opposing Rauner. While the margin will undoubtedly be much tighter in November, it's

**"Voters across the political spectrum have turned their backs on Rauner and his reign of error."**

step forward in our continuing battle to protect working families' living standards and public services in Illinois," said John Cameron, AFSCME Council 31's director of political and community relations.

"The most important marker was the overwhelming rejection of Bruce Rauner by

clear that most Illinoisans have turned their backs on Rauner and his reign of error."

AFSCME-endorsed Attorney General candidate State Senator Kwame Raoul won the Democratic nomination by some 35,000 votes statewide—close, but still considerably higher than Rauner's



AFSCME members and their families are ready to elect a new governor and win a better future for working people in Illinois.

margin in the Republican gubernatorial primary.

"We won this primary together," said Raoul. "It wouldn't have been possible without the support of AFSCME members. I'm looking forward to fighting against attacks on workers' rights as your next AG."

AFSCME did not make any endorsement in the Democratic gubernatorial primary. Recognizing the importance of focusing our

union's efforts on defeating Rauner in November, delegates to the January PEOPLE conference voted to allow the PEOPLE Executive Committee to make an endorsement after the primary. The committee is expected to meet in April. All other general election endorsements will be made at the PEOPLE Conference set for August 18.

"The battle for November is already underway," Cameron said.

AFSCME and other unions are beginning now to lay the groundwork for an unprecedented voter outreach effort to defeat Bruce Rauner that will launch this summer.

"Rauner has made clear that if he's reelected, he will renew his crusade to wipe out public employee unions in Illinois," said Cameron. "We will need an army of grassroots union volunteers to make sure that he's a one-term governor." 



## Getting ready for November

The primary election is over. AFSCME-backed candidates had a great day. Now it's time to get serious about defeating Bruce Rauner in November.

Throughout the primary season, Rauner demonstrated once again that he will do anything to win re-election so he can pursue his goal of wiping out public employee unions and driving down the wages and benefits of all workers.

AFSCME local unions are now working to build an army of volunteers who are trained and prepared to reach out to every voter in the state of Illinois. No one can sit this one out.

"I want to help elect people who will stand with us and support our rights," said AFSCME Local 1276 President Bettye Silas, who knocked on doors for Brandon Johnson's campaign in Cook County this March.

"Bruce Rauner is detrimental to public workers and the community because he wants to take working people backwards," Silas said. "Consider what's at stake if we don't come forward: Without us, working people will have no voice at all. We've got to stand together to defeat the foe before us."

**"I want to help elect people who will stand with us and support our rights."**

**Contact your local union leadership to get involved in AFSCME's voter outreach program.**

# State Capitol 2018: Bills to Watch

The 2018 legislative session is underway. AFSCME Council 31's legislative team is actively building support for bills that improve job conditions and fairness for working families, and opposition to bills aimed at undercutting workers' rights.

## SUPPORT:

### State employee back pay

AFSCME IS WORKING TO PASS NEW legislation to fund the remaining back pay still owed to thousands of state employees since a pay raise was withheld in 2011. SB 2269 is sponsored by Sen. Andy Manar (D); Rep. Jerry Costello sponsors HB 4290.

The Illinois Supreme Court has ruled that the wages are owed to employees, but that they cannot be paid without a legislative appropriation. Call your legislators on the AFSCME hotline today at 888-912-5959 and urge them to vote YES on SB 2269 and HB 4290.

## SUPPORT:

### Fair wages for DSPs

AFTER WINNING A 75-CENT WAGE increase for direct service personnel (DSP) in state-funded disability agencies, AFSCME members are stepping up their campaign to increase starting wages for DSPs to \$15 per hour with SB 3508 and HB 5622, sponsored by Heather Steans in the Senate and Robyn Gabel in the House. The legislation would set DSP wages at no lower than \$13.50 per hour by July of this year and \$15 per hour by July of 2020.

On April 18, AFSCME members held a Lobby Day in Springfield and talked to lawmakers about sponsoring and supporting the legislation for a livable wage. You can call legislators using the DSP hotline at 844-259-0916 to urge support for the bills.

AFSCME is also supporting SB 3076 sponsored by Sen. Sam McCann and HB 5018 sponsored by Rep. Justin Slaughter, which would require DHS to identify ways to raise wages in school-based programs for children with developmental and physical disabilities. Funded by school districts and the state, these programs did not receive the additional funding for a 75-cent raise.

## SUPPORT:

### Workplace safety reporting

WORKPLACE SAFETY IS A CRUCIAL ISSUE, yet too many state agencies see no urgency to address the growing problem of assaults on employees. That's why AFSCME brought the issue to the General Assembly. SB 3075 (Hastings) and HB 4895 (Halpin) would require DCFS, DHS, DOC and DJJ to track instances of violence against staff and report all such incidents to the General Assembly to heighten awareness and accountability.

## SUPPORT:

### Fair income tax

ILLINOIS IS ONLY ONE OF FOUR STATES in the U.S. with a constitutionally mandated flat, regressive income tax structure. A flat tax unfairly burdens middle-income and working families while allowing the wealthy to avoid paying their fair share. Polling demonstrates widespread public support for a fairer tax structure, but voters can't have a say unless both the House and Senate approve resolutions to put a constitutional amendment on the November ballot. AFSCME is supporting SJRCA 1 and HJRCA 39 so that Illinois can have the resources it needs to fully fund vital public services.

## OPPOSE:

### Anti-collective bargaining bills

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF ANTI-WORKER bills in the General Assembly during this legislative session. The bills have several different goals, including: removing public service administrators from the state employee bargaining unit; creating a state right-to-work-for-less act; making the ethics act preempt any collective bargaining agreement or personnel code, which would essentially give the Rauner administra-

tion the ability to get around union contracts to achieve nearly anything it wishes; limiting required topics of bargaining to a strictly-defined parameter of employee wages (not including overtime, holidays, automatic pay progressions, health insurance, hours or conditions of employment, for examples); requiring local governments to publicly post contracts before they can be ratified, and more.

## OPPOSE:

### Municipal bankruptcy

SPONSORED BY REP. JEANNE IVES, HB 5644 would allow municipalities to circumvent collective bargaining agreements and pension obligations by claiming bankruptcy due to financial deficits.

## OPPOSE:

### Repeal of school accountability law

AFSCME HELPED PASS A LAW IN 2007 that sets rigorous accountability standards for privatization of non-instructional school services. It mandates 90 days written notice of layoffs, prohibits privatization in the midst of a collective bargaining agreement, and requires that employers offer comparable wage and benefit packages to new employees, and more. This law protects school districts from the perils of privatization and ensures that schools make changes for efficiency, not to cut wages and benefits for employees. Rep. Tom Bennett's HB 4196 would repeal that law in its entirety, removing roadblocks to privatization and reducing the notification of layoffs to 30 days. 



AFSCME Local 486 members from ASPIRE and the Bellwood Developmental Center met with Sen. Don Harmon at the union's 2018 DSP Lobby Day.

# UCAN workers win a union

*After solid victory, employer challenges election*



**N**early 200 employees at UCAN, a youth services agency on Chicago's West Side, won their union despite an intensive anti-union campaign waged by their employer.

They fought for a better future for themselves and for the youth they serve everyday—and won.

UCAN management challenged the decisive vote count conducted by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), but after an investigation the labor board dismissed the

objections. The workers' union certification is forthcoming.

UCAN employees started talking about forming a union many months ago. The workers knew that the problems they faced on the job had to be addressed if UCAN wanted a high-quality, dedicated workforce and positive outcomes for

the at-risk youth they sought to help. So the workers decided to reach out to AFSCME.

AFSCME's organizing team went into action alongside worker activists. After months of organizing, the workers filed for a union representation election at the NLRB on February 8. When the ballots were tallied on March 20, their victory was in hand.

"I'm relieved and excited for what's ahead," said Lila Couloute, a program support specialist who has worked at UCAN for eight years. "I really appreciate my co-workers. They work hard but they aren't supported and don't get

the recognition they deserve. That's why I wanted to keep pushing for this union. We deserve more. We deserve better pay, more support, and to be heard."

"It's a great feeling," said case manager Crystal Gardner. "I'm so proud to be a part of this moment."

## Retaliation for organizing

UCAN MANAGEMENT WAGED an intense and well-funded anti-union campaign against their employees to prevent them from winning a union.

Employees at UCAN are

paid an average of \$12 an hour, yet the agency hired a union-busting attorney who was paid thousands of dollars to push employees to vote No.

Gardner, who has worked at UCAN for nearly three years, said she stayed motivated during the hard fight by knowing her rights and wanting to help her co-workers know their rights too—and stand up for them.

## Crossing the finish line

COMMUNITY SUPPORT WAS critical to the workers' ability to fight off anti-union aggression by management. United Church of Christ, ARISE Chicago and the Leadership Network all called on UCAN to respect the workers' rights to form a union.

"The faith community stands with you," said Pastor Cy Fields of New Landmark Missionary Baptist Church. "These workers deserve dignity and respect."

Now these newest members of AFSCME can begin the process of negotiating their first union contract and building their new union.

"We see the power in numbers," Couloute said. "It wasn't just one person. We all came together, stood strong and united, and got this win. Now we can move forward and we'll finally have a voice." 

# Upward Mobility Program starts up again

**A**fter halting the State of Illinois Upward Mobility Program (UMP) for almost three years, the Rauner administration has agreed to fund the program, which is getting ready to accept new registrations for the first time since 2016.

UMP is a career mobility program established pursuant to the AFSCME collective bargaining agreement. It gives state employees an opportunity to advance to more challenging, higher-paying positions through individual career counseling, proficiency exams, and education and train-

ing programs in data processing, office services, accounting, human services, criminal justice, social work and medical fields.

Because funding was withheld from the joint venture between AFSCME and the state, UMP was cut to a skeleton staff that has been working hard just

to counsel current enrollees. At the last open enrollment in August 2016, there were 4,000 active participants and 3,600 new enrollees.

"The Upward Mobility Program is in high demand among state employees," AFSCME Council 31 UMP Coordinator Chris Goodman said. "UMP gives anyone who enrolls the ability to improve their work life, their education level, take on a more challenging position and to better themselves."

Many employees use the program to test for certification for new positions because members with an UMP grade receive preference during hiring. That

is in part due to the high-level testing provided by UMP.

"Our tests are graded strictly," Goodman said, "and as a result we've promoted more than 8,900 employees to their target UMP goal."

Some employees might not be looking for a promotion, but rather a lateral move to a different agency. UMP can help with that as well.

"I've seen all kinds of career changes," Goodman said. "It's up to you."

UMP also allows AFSCME members to get tuition reimbursement for continued college education. Enrollees can take two classes per semester (and

one in the summer) at a traditional semester school at \$400 per college credit and \$450 per graduate-level credit.

"Once you get in the program, stay active," Goodman advised. "If you're interested in a target title, get the grade now because they are good for six years. When your chance opens up, you'll be ready to go."

Another open enrollment period is anticipated later this spring. Tuition reimbursement should be reestablished in July. Visit [AFSCME31.org/UMP](http://AFSCME31.org/UMP) and search for Upward Mobility Program to see target titles.

Online registration will soon become available. 

# Illinois Supreme Court rejects Rauner appeal on steps

*AFSCME wins another round in legal fight*

**A** FSCME has prevailed again in the ongoing court battle for payment of state employee step increases that Gov. Rauner has illegally frozen since July 1, 2015.

When bargaining for a new state contract got underway in 2015, the law required that current conditions of employment remain in place—including movement through the state's pay plan. But Rauner ignored that requirement and acted unilaterally to impose a freeze on employee step increases.

AFSCME challenged that action in appellate court and won. Last November, the 5th District Appellate Court ruled that the Rauner Administration violated the law when it refused to continue paying step increases after the expiration date of the union contract. The court found that employees are owed step increases and remanded the case back to the Illinois Labor

Relations Board for a remedy.

That ruling was put on hold when the Rauner Administration filed a petition for leave to appeal to the Illinois Supreme Court but on March 21, the Supreme Court denied the petition for leave to appeal. So the appellate decision stands. The steps are owed and no further appeal is possible.

Now the case will be remanded to the Labor Board.

AFSCME is urging the board to ensure that all state employees receive the step increases they are owed and deserve. AFSCME members are rallying at the State Capitol on April 26 with Illinois Comptroller Susana Mendoza to call the on the Labor Board to act swiftly. 



## Rauner's 2019 budget: Another attack on working families

*More of the same harmful flim-flam*

**I**n his proposed 2019 state budget, Gov. Bruce Rauner once again tried to blame public employees for the state's financial woes.

He's making exaggerated claims about pay and benefits as a way to pursue his goal of taking away collective bargaining rights.

"Rauner's unbalanced budget threatens to destabilize our school systems, undermine our public universities, and push our state into ever deeper fiscal chaos," said Roberta Lynch, AFSCME Council 31 executive director. "He's recycling well-worn assaults on public service workers and retirees, seeking to impose unaffordably high health care costs, undermine retirement security and weak-

en union rights."

While Rauner casts employee health insurance costs as a "make or break" issue for state finances, they actually only represent a small portion of the state's multi-billion dollar budget. His proposal to impose much higher health care costs on state workers is illegal, since a court order bars him from doing so. But his budget plan tries to end-run that restriction by relying on passage of legislation to remove health care as a mandatory subject of bargaining.

Rauner's scheme to shift the state's pension debt to school districts and universities would destabilize an already strained education system. His latest push to cut the modest pensions that public employees earn and pay toward is unconstitutional.

Rauner's plan would effectively:

- Drastically increase health care costs for state and university employees by an average of \$3,700 per year;
- Eliminate employees' right to bargain over health insurance benefits through our union, so that he could impose his huge health care cost hikes and we would have no legal recourse to stop him;
- Cut the pension benefits of current state and university employees by requiring

**"Our billionaire governor wants working people to bear the brunt of a fiscal crisis he created."**

employees to choose either future pay increases or continued accrual of pension benefits.

"From public service workers who do demanding and dangerous jobs to cash-strapped local governments that are hurting and have nowhere to turn, our billionaire governor wants working

people to bear the brunt of a fiscal crisis he created," Lynch said.

"What Illinois really needs is needs a budget that's responsible, balanced and fair," Lynch said. "We need a fair tax with higher rates for people with higher incomes and lower rates for people with lower incomes to raise enough revenue to pay the state's bills and invest in public services.

"But Rauner isn't interested in fairness or a better future for our state. The people of Illinois know this and they are ready for change in November." 

**Correction:** In our January-February issue (page 2) it was stated that Rauner travels by state plane. In fact, Rauner grounded executive state planes in 2015, resulting in layoffs.

## Who's Behind This Case?



The plaintiff, Mark Janus, is a state employee in Springfield but merely a pawn in a much larger game. He was recruited to serve as Gov. Bruce Rauner's surrogate.



The lawsuit was originally filed in federal court in Illinois by Gov. Rauner, who still claims it as his own and says it's the "biggest thing" he's ever done. The court dismissed Rauner from the suit because he didn't have standing to bring it.



**NATIONAL RIGHT TO WORK  
LEGAL DEFENSE FOUNDATION**



**LIBERTY  
JUSTICE  
CENTER**

**ILLINOIS  
POLICY  
INSTITUTE**

The case is backed by a shadowy network of Rauner's fellow billionaires and radical anti-worker groups like the National Right-to-Work Foundation, the Illinois Policy Institute and its litigation arm, the Liberty Justice Center. They want to strike a "mortal blow" against unions and will wage an aggressive campaign to get union members to drop out.

# PUBLIC EMPLOYEES TARGET OF UNION DESTRUCTION S

## Supreme Court set to rule *Janus v. AFSCME Council*

It's no accident that working people are struggling today. For decades, powerful billionaires and special interests have used their massive fortunes to rig the rules and acquire more power and wealth for themselves at the expense of everyone else.

Now they want the highest court in the land to take away the freedom of public employees to come together to protect the things our families need.

*Janus v. AFSCME Council 31*, a lawsuit initiated by Illinois governor Bruce Rauner, is a political attack that seeks to take away the freedom of public employees to join together in strong unions to speak up for ourselves, our families and our communities. Through unions, workers can advocate for the communities we serve and win higher standards for working conditions, wages, health care, and retirement security that benefit all working people.

But the shadowy anti-worker forces behind this case want to silence our voices. They claim our wages are too high, our health care coverage too generous, and our pension benefits undeserved. Simply put, they want to wipe out the decent middle-class standard of living it's taken us decades to achieve.

The plaintiff in this case is Mark Janus, a state employee in Springfield. But he's merely a pawn in a much larger game, recruited to serve as a surrogate for Gov. Rauner and his allies at the Illinois Policy Institute.

Janus is backed by a network of Rauner's fellow billionaires who, like him, aim to starve unions of resources by banning fair share fees, paving the way for an employee in a union workplace to benefit from all the gains the union makes while contributing nothing toward the cost of union representation.

The forces behind the lawsuit are funding it because they see our freedom to build strength in numbers as a threat to their power. In fact, the National Right-to-Work Foundation, the Illinois Policy Institute and its Liberty Justice Center, and, of course, Bruce Rauner, are planning to spend millions of dollars on an aggressive campaign to get members to drop out of the union once the Supreme Court rules. 🏹

# FEES: ON- SCHEME

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## TAKE ACTION: STAY AFSCME STRONG!

**U**nions are the most effective vehicle for employees to pool their resources to fight for their rights and their families. The forces behind this case know that, and that's why they want to divide us.

The most important thing for us to do now is to remain united. The Supreme Court is expected to issue a decision in this case no later than June. And AFSCME members are more determined than ever before.

"It's critical that we stand together," said AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. "Every member can sign a pledge card to recommit to being AFSCME Strong and talk to their co-workers about what's at stake. And every fee-payer can send a powerful message to Bruce Rauner and his wealthy cronies by signing a union membership card today." 

### MADISON COUNTY LOCAL 799: 100% UNION

One hundred percent of the 381 members of AFSCME Local 799 in Madison County are full dues-paying members. The local worked hard to talk to every fair share fee-payer and each one joined as a full member. It was a team effort, spearheaded by local President Chris Milton, Vice President Cathi Gitchoff and Council 31 Staff Representative Carla Gillespie.

"We never gave up, we just stayed on it," said Milton of getting every card signed. "At the end of the day, we're all in this together. We're all on the same team and we try our best to act like it."

Madison County has seen a big change over the last year. In 2016, for the first time in a very long time, the county administration became majority Republican, including the county board chairperson. This was a major shift for the local government. The union was proactive and worked to add 49 new members to the bargaining unit before the change in administration took effect.

Milton said it's not just in Madison County that workers are feeling threatened. "It's the environment everywhere. Everyone is a target and it's a constant battle," he said. Those in power "don't believe you deserve anything, not your retirement, your vacation, your personal time. They just want you to work for them."

Right now the most important thing is unity, Milton said.

"We need to value all the relationships that we have with our co-workers, our friends at work, our fellow members. Every single one of us serves a very important role. We are up against a huge challenge and we need each other. To make it work, everything has to come together and we can't ever give up."



***"We never gave up. At the end of the day, we're all in this together."***

# AFSCME Free College Benefit

*A new program brings college within reach for more AFSCME members*

A college degree or certificate can be a pathway to new opportunities, greater responsibility and more earning power.

But it's out of reach for some working families. That's why AFSCME and Eastern Gateway Community College are offering the AFSCME Free College Benefit, a chance to earn an online degree from an accredited school with no out-of-pocket expense.

The AFSCME Free College Benefit covers any amount for tuition, fees or books that is not covered by federal or employer education grants. Students must comply with federal, state and college academic and financial aid policies.

AFSCME members, retirees and family (children, stepchildren, grandchildren, step-grandchildren, spouses, domestic partners or financial dependents) are eligible for the benefit.

In order to determine the amount of your scholarship, students first apply for and use any federal student aid awarded through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Even if it's determined that you are not eligible for any grants, AFSCME's last-dollar scholarship has you covered. It will still be applied to your remaining balance for tuition, fees and e-books.

For step-by-step instructions on how to apply, visit [FreeCollege.AFSCME.org](http://FreeCollege.AFSCME.org) or call 888-590-9009.

## Monica Houston

**AFSCME LOCAL 805**  
STATE EMPLOYEE, SPRINGFIELD

"I GOT AN EMAIL FROM AFSCME about the Free College Benefit and I was curious to see if it was legitimate. You hear about a lot of 'free' things but then you have to jump through hurdles and find out it's not really free. But I looked into it. I applied. Now I'm in my second year and I haven't had to pay anything. It's definitely legit!

"I am currently working on my associate's degree. The classes are eight weeks long. You work at your own pace but you have to keep up with the curriculum and make sure you're turning your homework in on time. It's like being in class without the pressure or intimidation of being around young people.

"The associate's degree isn't the easiest because it covers all the prerequisites. But once I got going, I got my confidence back and I thought: I can do this. It's great because you have professors. They email you and keep in contact. If you're struggling, they have online tutors who are really helpful and there are labs that give you a chance to test yourself.

"No one in my family went to college and I want to be the first. I decided to make



"This program gave me a great opportunity. I would recommend it to anybody who wants their degree. Go for it!"

the time to do this because I wanted to show my grandchildren that it can be done at any age. Nothing good comes easy and anything worth doing is worth putting your all

into it. No excuses.

"This program gave me a great opportunity. I hope to have my associate's degree by this summer and after that move on to the next degree.

"I would recommend this program to anybody who wants their degree. Just follow the instructions that are provided. Make an effort and go for it. Go to college!"

## MEMBERS-ONLY BENEFITS

AFSCME provides members with many exclusive programs, services and discounts

Learn more at [AFSCME31.org/Benefits](http://AFSCME31.org/Benefits)

- **AFSCME FREE College:** A 100 percent free online associate degree from Eastern Gateway Community College for AFSCME members and their families.
- **Scholarships:** AFSCME members and their children are eligible for a number of college scholarships.
- **AFSCME Advantage Credit Card:** Pay no annual fee and become eligible for job-loss benefits.
- **Accidental Death Insurance:** Get up to \$20,000 of accidental death insurance at no cost.
- **AT&T Wireless:** Save 15 percent on individual and family plans.
- **Hearing Aid Discount Plan:** Provides free annual hearing screening, discounts on high quality hearing aids, damage insurance, cleaning and batteries.
- **Auto Insurance:** Save hundreds of dollars; add homeowners insurance and save even more.
- **Credit Counseling:** Get a free consumer credit counseling session and on the road to financial recovery.
- **Legal Service:** Get attorney references and a half-hour of no-cost consultation.
- **Mortgage Program:** Receive a gift card ranging from \$300 to \$750 after closing.

# Bloomington AFSCME members halt privatization

*Quick action and community support prevent outsourcing*

**T**he same night our Local 699 contract was on the consent agenda, the city council was discussing how to address a budget shortfall," recalled AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Renee Nestler.

"One council member suggested exploring outsourcing the city's solid waste program and that immediately kicked off our campaign to organize and mobilize to stop it."

That meeting was on January 22. Three weeks later the Bloomington City Council narrowly voted down the outsourcing possibility. Adam Smith, president of the local union, said he credits the swift, united action by the membership and their strong ties in the community.

"We're extremely excited that we kept the work in-house," Smith said. "Without all the members coming together, it wouldn't have happened, and surely not that fast."

Members of AFSCME Local 699 work in the city's public works department, parks, zoo

and library. The city was looking only at outsourcing the solid waste program, which is responsible for picking up garbage and refuse from residential and other properties.

The solid waste program was deemed an enterprise fund in 2011, which means that customers pay a fee for the services provided and the city does not need to use general fund money to cover it. But the fees never covered the cost of the services. Instead of simply raising fees, the council was ready to consider outsourcing the services.

## Members step up

ONE THING THAT HELPED the local union react so quickly was a new practice that Smith instituted when

he became president. Membership meetings had long been held at 7 p.m. once a month, but typically only the executive board members would participate. In January the leadership decided to try member meetings right after work, at 3:15 p.m.

"It made a huge difference," Smith said. "We went from only officers to having 20 to 30 members at every meeting. It's such an important way to keep the membership informed and united."

Union members began calling city council members themselves, said Smith, but they quickly realized that their voices were not the ones that would sway the council's decision. So they started reaching out to their network of family, friends and customers.

They passed out fliers alerting residents to the council's plans and the potential consequences, and listed every council member's name and phone number. They encouraged people to call their city council person to urge them to vote no on privatization.

**"For a private contractor, everything is an extra charge; for AFSCME members, it's part of a job well done."**

## Strong community support

THE PEOPLE OF BLOOMINGTON value the services that AFSCME members provide. In addition to picking up garbage, recycling, brush, leaves and bulk, these workers go out of their way to help their community. They plow snow, pick up debris after car accidents, maintain alleys and manage a free-drop off facility. They help the elderly and people with restrictive medical needs by picking up garbage at their door and returning the empty containers right back to their doorstep.

"A private contractor would nickel and dime the people of Bloomington for in-depth service like that,"

said Nestler. "We really emphasized that when you look at privatization you must compare apples to apples. For a contractor everything is an extra charge; for AFSCME members it's part of a job well done."

What really saved the day were the strong ties these AFSCME members have in the community that they serve.

"Interacting with the residents is my favorite part of the job," said Smith. "We have a good relationship and it was great to have their support. I've had a lot of people come up to me on the street and say they can't believe the council even thought about doing this. They say we're doing a great job and they love our service. And that's always good." 



Bloomington public works employee Adam Smith picks up waste on a snowy winter day. He and his fellow members of AFSCME Local 699 go the extra mile to provide high-quality service.

# ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

## Emergency services employees make gains

MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 2817-Chapter 1 unanimously ratified a new contract that establishes contractual step increases and raises wages by eight percent over three years for both full- and part-time employees at the city of Columbia near St. Louis.

Paramedics and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) can now elect to accrue compensatory time in lieu of overtime pay, and can use sick time to care for family members. The contract also increases the uniform allowance and adjusts the schedule so that a fully rested employee starts every 24 hours.

"We were really happy with what we did in negotiations," said Mike Evans, chapter chair and full-time paramedic. "We instituted pay increases based on years of experience. Before this, a brand-new employee would make the same as someone who's worked for 20 years."

The negotiating team was focused on the step increases and raises to help ensure a

high-quality and long-term workforce that is competitive with other departments and regions.

"We want to attract and retain quality people to help with burnout and reduce turnover," Evans said. "This is a good place to work and it's only getting better."

Local 2817 President Patrick Battoe is a part-time paramedic at the city of Columbia and a full-time paramedic in the neighboring chapter of O'Fallon. Each of the three Local 2817 chapters negotiate their contracts separately but this agreement will help them all.

**"This is a good place to work and it's only getting better."**

"I think they did a great job and were able to come up with a pretty phenomenal deal," Battoe said. "They were able to work with the new EMS chief, who has two decades of EMS experi-



AFSCME Local 2817 members Doug Sutphin, Jim Wilderman, Mike Evans and Jared Huch with EMS Coordinator Kim Lamprecht.

ence, to get what's best for the employees and therefore what's best for the people they serve."

"A positive, respectful relationship was instrumental in reaching this win-win agreement," said Kim Lamprecht, EMS coordinator for the city.

The Local 2817 bargaining team led by AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Patricia Rensing included Evans, Brandon Layton and Matthew Strayhorn.

In a tough job where workers hold peoples' lives in their hands, Evans said, there is a lot of stress. But those kinds of stakes "add meaning to your job. You feel good about helping people."

## Maryville Academy employees ratify second union contract

AFSCME LOCAL 55 WON RAISES and expanded benefits in their second union contract with Maryville Academy, a nonprofit services agency in Northern Illinois for at-risk children and families.

"Having the union has helped us get some things we've been requesting for years," said Martha Stroger, youth care worker. "My co-workers who were afraid and against the union now don't want to be without it. Now they aren't afraid to challenge management or speak up about their concerns."

The workers won a significant and much-needed wage increase of 11.5 percent over three years. They increased vacation time accrual for workers with more than 10 years on the job, added a bereavement day and extended the shift differential of 50 cents an hour to any employee who works a second shift.

After a slew of layoffs relat-

ed to budget cuts, the committee also extended the required layoff notice from 30 to 60 days. And the agency's sick leave policy is now compliant with the Cook County sick leave ordinance, allowing workers to accumulate more sick time by rolling unused time to the next year.

AFSCME members at Maryville Academy work in the St. Monica drug addiction recovery home for mothers (a new part of the bargaining unit), a children's health care center, a crisis nursery that provides respite for families in trauma, and residential programs for traumatized girls with mental or developmental disabilities.

The Local 55 bargaining committee led by AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Kathy Steichen included Stroger, Dorothy Smith, Delondria Howard McDonald, Pam Bridges, Deborah Davis and Theadora Pride.

"We are all working to help the girls and women be strong, positive individuals who aren't afraid to set goals and build toward a better future," Stroger said. "My co-workers support each other and work as a team, and it has a positive impact on the people we serve."



Martha Stroger, Theadora Pride and Deborah Davis served on the Local 55 bargaining team in negotiations with Maryville Academy.

## National Library Week

AFSCME members celebrated National Library Week, April 8-14. AFSCME represents more library workers than any other union in the country and nearly 3,000 library workers in Illinois are part of AFSCME Council 31. They provide essential public service in city libraries, school and university libraries and law libraries across the state.



AFSCME Local 1041 members at Berwyn Public Library celebrate National Library Week together.

# Employees caring for veterans take a stand

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs has a big problem with overtime. Too many employees are being required to work too many hours.

Exhausted and fed up, AFSCME members filed more than 60 grievances related to overtime mandates.

Mike Sarkozi, 2nd Vice President of AFSCME Local 1563 at the Manteo Veterans Home, serves on the union's third-level multi-agency grievance committee. While helping his co-workers fight disciplinary actions, Sarkozi himself was disciplined for refusing an overtime mandate.

"I refused the mandate because my daughter was graduating high school, a once-in-a-lifetime event," Sarkozi said. "I'm not going to miss that."

A busy father of four, Sarkozi tries to volunteer for overtime as much as possible when his schedule allows, so he can be home with his kids when he needs to be. After 22 years as a veteran nurse aide assistant, he thought that between providing proof of the graduation and his track record of working overtime regularly, this one exception

wouldn't be a problem.

Instead he was disciplined and filed a grievance that the union won.

Sarkozi argues that his case, and many others like it, shouldn't have existed in the first place. In addition to the toll on staff and their families, Sarkozi said the level of overtime is just not sustainable for the state agency.

"They paid out 38,000 hours of overtime in a 10-month period," he said. "That creates an unsafe environment for employees and for the veterans we're caring for. It's not good for anybody."

AFSCME pushed back hard on the department, pointing out that its approach was unfair to staff and unworkable operationally. As a result the department has begun hiring in earnest, all discipline for overtime refusals has been expunged, and a new incentive program was established whereby employees who don't use sick time or work overtime for a certain



AFSCME Local 1563 Vice President Mike Sarkozi (pictured with his children) pushed back against DVA's excessive overtime practices.

period are allowed to skip a mandatory overtime shift.

Since the union's action, Sarkozi sees a lot of improvement in the overtime situation. But he's still volunteer-

ing for overtime whenever he can.

"My oldest is starting college, so I work overtime to help her," he said. "It's a struggle, but I'm grateful

for what I have. I tell myself every day how wonderful it is to have affordable health care and a pension so I can provide for my children the way I want to." 

# Violence, mismanagement at Chester Mental Health Center

Violence has been increasing at the Chester Mental Health Center where more than 400 AFSCME members work.

The forensic mental health facility houses and cares for residents found not guilty of crimes by reason of insanity or deemed mentally unfit to stand criminal trial. Five of the six units in the facility are maximum-security units.

In March and April, two security therapy aides were taken to the hospital for treatment after being attacked by residents. They

suffered broken bones, concussions, stitches and more.

"Attacks on staff are not uncommon," said AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Ty Petersen. "But the attacks in the past year or two seem to be happening more often and are much more brutal in nature."

Part of the problem, said Petersen, is that the facility is run like a mental health

facility instead of the maximum-security facility that it is. Employees are not able to use tools traditionally available to staff dealing with potentially violent residents.

The union has made efforts to work with the Department of Human Services to improve the situation, but its pleas have "fallen on deaf ears," Petersen said.

In addition to working in a threatening environment, AFSCME members are often wrongly accused of abusing residents. While investigations are pending, employees can be suspended or even terminated. Sometimes they are unemployed for months at a time while AFSCME takes their case

**"There's been no concern. Something isn't right here and something needs to be done."**

through the grievance procedure and into arbitration.

AFSCME has prevailed in all 17 arbitration cases it has brought on behalf of employees accused of wrongdoing at the facility. They are made whole for lost wages and ben-

efits and reinstated on the job.

While the employees are off duty, the agency does not replace them but rather uses mandatory and voluntary overtime to cover the work. This practice combined with arbitration proceedings is costing the state hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"Yet there's been no concern," Petersen said. "No one in DHS management has asked why 17 arbitrations have been ruled in the employees' favor. No one seems to care to put the puzzle pieces together."

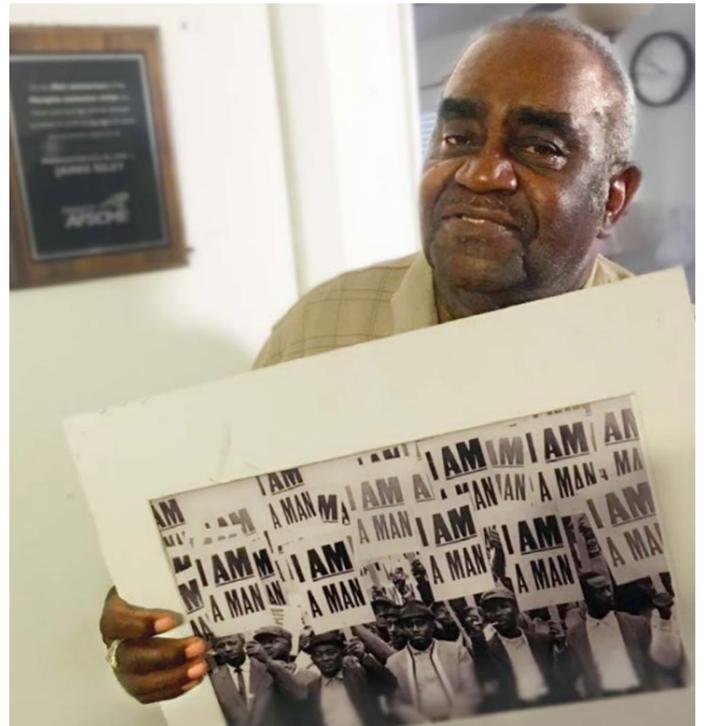
"Something isn't right here and something needs to be done." 

# 50 years after marching with MLK

*James Riley was on the front lines in fight for respect*



James Riley marched in Memphis in 1968 with his fellow sanitation workers and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (left; Riley is center right in cardigan). He carries those memories with him today in Chicago (right).



A strike by sanitation workers fighting to form their union with AFSCME brought Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Memphis, Tennessee in the spring of 1968.

One of the few surviving Memphis strikers, James Riley, now lives in Chicago and remembers those days vividly.

Then in his mid-20s, Riley picked up trash at commercial buildings from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. He was paid a dollar

an hour. “We worked like hell lifting those 55-gallon drums and the No. 3 tubs,” he told Smithsonian magazine. “You’d put that tub on your shoulder and it would leak on you and you’d smell like garbage.”

Disgusted with the low pay and poor, unsafe working

conditions, “We were trying to get a union in the Public Works department,” Riley remembers.

On Feb. 1, 1968, two sanitation workers were crushed to death in the back of a malfunctioning garbage truck, the likes of which employees had long warned the city about. The deaths were why “we finally went on strike,” Riley says. But when they did, the white mayor “Henry Loeb said he didn’t care if garbage piled up in the black neighborhoods.”

Reflecting their demand to be treated with dignity and

respect, sanitation workers marched with placards that read, “I Am A Man.” The city responded with violence. “When we marched, they threw Mace on us,” Riley recalls.

Dr. King saw the workers’ struggle as part of the civil rights movement, and he came three times to Memphis to address the workers and march with them.

The fabled leader “was very brilliant,” Riley says, “but he didn’t talk down to anyone. And he’d always have a smile on his face. We’d be talking and laughing—not a lot, just a little bit, because he was very sincere in what he was doing. And when he said nonviolence, that’s what he meant: nonviolence.”

On the night of April 3, King’s associate Ralph Abernathy was slated to speak to a union meeting at the Mason Temple. King was ill and stayed at the Lorraine Motel.

There was a terrible rainstorm, and when Abernathy arrived at the church to find a hardy group of 1,000 strikers and their supporters had braved the downpours, he called King to come over and address them.

“I had intended to get there,” Riley remembers, but “the streets were flooded. I drove two blocks and the water was too deep for my car. I had to turn around.”

That night King delivered his prophetic “Mountaintop” speech, declaring, “I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we,

as a people, will get to the promised land.”

The next day, Riley was sorting donations of food at the Clayborn Temple—a home base for the union during the strike—when “somebody called and told us Dr. King had been shot” outside the motel just half a mile away.

“I was hurt, really hurt,” Riley says. “I shed quite a few tears. They done killed him, for what? He was trying to help the people.”

Two weeks after King’s death, the city agreed to recognize the union and settle the first contract. Riley served on the union bargaining committee.

“I was part of the negotiations. I helped get that contract,” he recalls. “It was a pay increase, and working conditions changed. It was worth it.”

The next year, Riley moved to Chicago’s south side. He went to work for more than three decades at Oscar Mayer and then the Entenmann’s bakery, both union jobs.

“If I had it to do all over, I would,” Riley says. “The union is a help—the pay, what kind of contract you’ve got, you’re treated much better with a union.”

In February, AFSCME Council 31 and the Illinois labor movement honored Riley at the Working People’s Day of Action rally in Chicago. In early April he traveled to Memphis to participate in the 50th anniversary commemorative activities (inset) AFSCME sponsored there. 

## I AM 2018

AFSCME marked the 50th anniversary of Dr. King’s death—April 4—with events in Memphis, part of the “I Am 2018” campaign carrying King’s legacy forward.

Thousands heard speeches, received training, attended an emotional commemoration of King’s “Mountaintop” address and marched through the city.

Featured speakers included AFSCME International President Lee Saunders, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, Dr. King’s children Bernice and Martin III, civil rights leaders, young activists and more. Al Green, Common and others performed.

AFSCME Local 1866 President Ralph Portwood (left) traveled from Illinois to take part.

“It was inspirational to see how brothers and sisters from across the country were there and talking about the same issues,” he said. “Clergy, labor, Black Lives Matter, LGBT—all these movements were there and talking about the same things.”

“Memphis powerfully reminded us that the struggle of those courageous sanitation workers is still relevant to the struggles of today,” AFSCME Council 31 Deputy Director Mike Newman said.

“It showed me what we’re fighting for,” Portwood said. “It’s our job to protect what those who came before us achieved.”



# RETIREE NOTES

## Before My Union

*An Interview with Christine Turner,  
Chapter 31 Executive Board Member*

### What was your job when you were a public employee?

I worked as a Dietary Aide in the Illinois Department of Mental Health.

### What was work like before the union?

Before the union, it was difficult to afford my bills. Salaries were extremely low and I was worried about income most of the time. I didn't need to be rich, but I did want to afford to take care of my family.

I remember the way the supervisors would treat us. They threatened to fire us on the spot all the time. Supervisors didn't need any reason to fire you. They could fire you if they didn't like you! I was scared I was going to get fired each and every day. I needed my job. I couldn't afford to lose it.

### How did the union change your work life?

After the union, the salaries got much better. I was able to afford more for my family. The union made me feel safe at work. The supervisors couldn't treat us however they wanted to anymore. Because my co-workers and I felt protected, we got along with each other better. We also worked efficiently after we unionized because we were not anxious about losing our jobs.

### Why are you still active as a retiree today?

Even as a retiree, I can still stand up for the same rights I was fighting for when I was a working member. When I retired, my passion for the union didn't stop.

As an AFSCME retiree, I fight with my brothers and sisters for our retirement security, but I can also stand in solidarity with our working members. Why? I have children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who will live and grow up in this state. I am here to protect their rights and the future of the union as well.

### What would you say to current AFSCME members about the importance of staying union strong?

I would tell them that we will get over the impact of the Janus lawsuit, just like we overcame threats to unionize in the first place. We have to stand with each other, not just for us, but for the future workers of Illinois. We have to continue to teach members how important it is to stay strong in hard times as well as good.

That's what retirees can teach younger members. We have marched for our rights before. My legs hurt more than they did when I was younger, but I will never stop putting one foot in front of the other for our union. 



*“My legs hurt more than they did when I was younger, but I will never stop putting one foot in front of the other for our union.”*

## AFSCME Retirees Show Solidarity at Day of Action

On February 24, more than 5,000 proud union members showed up in Chicago's Daley Plaza to take part in the national Working People's Day of Action on the eve of oral arguments in *Janus vs. AFSCME Council 31*, a case at the Supreme Court that seeks to ban union fair share fees.

AFSCME Retiree Chapter 31 members from across the state joined in the Chicago rally to show solidarity for the fight ahead. Among the crowd was Sub-chapter 86 member Jim Dixon.

“We need to support our working members,” he said. “A lot of retirees remember what it was like before the right to bargain.



*“Solidarity doesn't stop at retirement.”*

We remember how it felt to be intimidated by supervisors and to be treated poorly at the workplace. Solidarity doesn't stop at

retirement.”

One Chapter 31 retiree attended an action in another state. David Spinner, Sub-chapter 87 president, attended a rally in Orlando, Florida, while on vacation with his wife.

“I had to attend,” Spinner said. “I couldn't make it to the Chicago action so I looked online for other actions. I know how important this lawsuit is and how it's going to affect union members across the country. I needed to be part of the movement and stand with those fighting for retirees and working members alike. The union helps us all.” 



outbreak and the H1N1 flu epidemic. Most recently I helped Puerto Ricans displaced after the hurricane.

The city created what we call the MARC—the multi-agency resource center—where different government and non-governmental organizations coordinate services for the evacuees from Puerto Rico.

We saw a lot of union members working really hard to provide services and we worked together across agencies—local, state, federal—and with community-based organizations. The health department helped with medications, post-surgery care, continuing ongoing treatments and addressing mental health issues.

### **How did it feel to help people in crisis?**

What impressed me the most was the solidarity, how people here happily opened their homes. Many people were staying with relatives and friends who had really big hearts but small apartments; it was hard to have a family of five in their living room.

Everyone who came from Puerto Rico was thankful and appreciated everything we did for them, but you could see that the federal government failed them. They didn't feel like they were treated like the Americans they are. Part of what we did was to show them that you are welcome here. You are welcome in Chicago. You are not a stranger, you are not a foreigner. This is your home.

### **How has the union impacted your life?**

The union provides peace of mind because everything is fair with a union. There are clear rules and everyone agrees to them. If you don't do your job, there is a process to discipline you. And if a manager is wrong, there is a process to protect you. I applied to a position and I didn't get it because someone had more seniority than me. But I've gotten some opportunities because I had more seniority. When they shut down the training unit I worked in, I was placed in another position. Without a union I would have lost my job.

I come from a long line of proud union members—my grandfather, father, brother, sister—and it's amazing how a union changes your life. I have three kids. Two are in college and one is living on his own with his own family. One of them is going to college using the AFSCME Free College benefit to get his degree. He's been working on it for two years and will graduate soon. That's been a lifesaver for me. Without the union that wouldn't be possible. That's the union working for me. 



# Orlando Valenzuela

## AFSCME Local 505

PUBLIC HEALTH ADMINISTRATOR, CITY OF CHICAGO

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**“The people of Chicago pay our salaries, so I try to provide them with the best service possible.”**

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### **Tell us about your career in public service.**

I've worked for the city of Chicago for more than 20 years. I'm happy to be here. I see myself as employed by the people of Chicago and that's who I want to do my best for, because I appreciate the opportunity to do this work.

I've had several jobs with the city. I started as an investigator for communicable diseases. I worked on tracking syphilis infections, finding and notifying partners to stop the spread of the disease. That's how we

have been able to reduce infections in the city. It's very important work.

I've been in my current position as a public health administrator for 15 years. I provide technical assistance to agencies receiving funding from the city. I help them train their staff and solve problems they face in their work.

### **What's your favorite part of your job?**

I like the interaction with the community. When people think of the health department they think of this faraway agency, but when they work with us they see the face of it. The people of Chicago pay our salaries, so I try to provide them with the best service possible. I also love volunteering in emergency situations.

### **What kind of volunteer work have you done?**

I've volunteered during many emergencies, like during the Ebola crisis, a meningitis